

EMPLOYMENT OF THE BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED

1975

An interview survey of 581 blind and partially
sighted persons in gainful occupations.

H. Rasmussen, H. Linstow and J. Skovmand

Summary

The Danish Association of the Blind and the
State Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted, Denmark.
Copenhagen 1978

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SJ/EJ 07-02

Dear Colleagues,

As part of our endeavours to improve the employment opportunities of the blind in Denmark, a registration of the actual employment conditions of the blind and partially sighted has been carried through. A summary of the report is enclosed.

Provided the necessary funds can be raised, the work will be continued so that an analysis of a series of selected occupations can be carried through.

Yours sincerely,

Svend Jensen

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C O N T E N T S

1.	BACKGROUND	3
2.	DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY	4
3.	RESULTS	6
3.1.	THE TWO SELECTED GROUPS AND CLASSIFICATION OF VISUAL ACUITY	6
3.2.	FORMS OF GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT 1975	7
3.3.	EMPLOYMENT BEFORE AND AFTER LOSS OF SIGHT	9
3.4.	FORM OF EMPLOYMENT	11
3.5.	WORK PLACE CONDITIONS	12
3.6.	EXECUTION OF WORK AND USE OF AIDS	13
3.7.	ASSISTANCE FROM SIGHTED PERSONS	14
3.8.	INCOMES	16
3.9.	TRANSPORT TO AND FROM WORK	18
3.10.	EMPLOYMENT SITUATION FOR MEMBERS OF THE DANISH ASSOCIATION OF THE BLIND	18
4.	LIST OF JOB TITLES ARRANGED ACCORDING TO OCCUPATION GROUPS	20
5.	REFERENCES	26



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1.

BACKGROUND

In February 1974 a three-day conference was held at the State Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted, Copenhagen, in cooperation with the Danish Association of the Blind. The theme: Employment opportunities for persons visually handicapped.

It became clear at the conference that there was a need to learn more about job opportunities for the visually handicapped. A steering committee was appointed to undertake a study of the employment situation among blind and partially sighted persons, and a working group to be responsible for execution of the project.

The steering committee split the study into two phases:

Phase 1: This phase was designed to obtain information on employment held by blind and partially sighted people and describe the conditions and manner in which the work is carried out.

Phase 2: This is a more detailed analysis of selected occupations or persons with a view to examining which factors have contributed to the person's retention of employment or which have enabled the person to seek other employment.

This is a summary of the report of phase 1.

2.

DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY

The report is based on 773 interviews of blind and partially sighted persons in the 15-64 age group conducted by the Danish National Institute of Social Research in autumn 1975. Of the total number, 581 respondents were gainfully employed at the time of the interview.

Those with the most serious defects in vision are members of the Danish Association of the Blind (DBS), and were selected on the basis of information the working group already possessed about their employment. They made up a total of 468 persons of whom 394 were in employment and 74 were unemployed at the time of the interview.

Criteria for membership of the Association of the Blind are visual acuity of maximum 6/60 with correction or better than 6/60 (0.1) when complications, particularly changes in the field of vision, have the result that vision may be deemed to correspond to 6/60 or below.

Persons who, with optimum correction, have visual acuity between 6/60 (0.1) and 6/18 (0.3) are classified as partially sighted.

It should be stressed that these numerical definitions serve only to distinguish the two groups of respondents. In the report it is the respondents' own assessment of the practical value of their residual vision that forms the basis of the classification of visual acuity.

The DBS has slightly more than 3.000 members in the economically active age group (15-64); of these, rather more than 600 are in fact in employment.

The group of partially sighted persons included in the survey and not members of the Danish Association of the Blind was selected from the files of the eye clinic of the State Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted (SIB). This register is the largest of its kind in Denmark, comprising more than 18.000 sets of records.

It should furthermore be stressed that respondents were not selected at random, which means that the group cannot be considered as representing the whole group of blind and partially sighted. On the contrary, the selection of respondents on the part of the Society of the Blind was based on a fairly certain knowledge that the persons concerned were in fact employed. The selection of respondents at the Institute was, however, largely made at random - having been conducted on the basis of what, for the purposes of this survey, was inadequate or out-of-date administrative records.

After that brief account of the introductory section of the report, an outline will be given below of chapters 3-12.

3.

RESULTS

3.1.

THE TWO SELECTED GROUPS AND CLASSIFICATION OF VISUAL ACUITY

Chapter 3

As already indicated, the group of respondents selected by the DBS was not representative; certain categories of employment were deliberately under-represented. This was primarily telephone operators and people engaged in consultative work for visually handicapped clients; approx. 100 and approx. 30 respectively were excluded from the survey. But the group of respondents does nevertheless include about two-thirds of all employed members of the DBS in the age group 15-64.

Respondents from the SIB were selected almost at random. After selection of the group, it was discovered that about 80% had experienced their first vision problems before the age of 15 years. As a result, this group of respondents can at best be considered as representative of younger persons of partial sight, whose vision problems were for the most part realised during school age. In addition, this group has a predominance of males and of persons from the east of Denmark.

Classification of the extent of the visually handicap was based on the respondent's evaluation of his/her own vision, and shows the following breakdown for the 581 gainfully employed respondents:

29% blind (169)
27% severely impaired vision (156)
30% partially sighted (176)

13% guiding vision (73)
1% reading vision (7)

The order of the first three groups of visual acuity expresses increasing degree of sight. This does not apply to the last two groups. It is to be presumed that changes in field of vision are the major reason why these respondents classified themselves in these groups.

Approx. 50% of the gainfully employed blind, 30% of those with severely impaired vision, and 19% of the partially sighted are over 50 years old.

More than one-half of the partially sighted live in Copenhagen or suburbs.

Approx. one-fifth of all visual acuity groups have taken leaving or matriculation certificates, whereas the proportion that attended only 9-10 years of compulsory education was largest among the partially sighted persons.

Approx. two-thirds of the employed persons are married, and in 9/10 of these marriages the spouse has normal vision.

3.2.

FORMS OF GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT 1975

Chapter 4

Occupations were classified in accordance with "Nordisk

"Yrkesklassificering" (3), the Scandinavian standard specifications, 3rd edition, 1974. Using this classification we can list more than 200 different occupational titles. The large number is also a result of the degree of accuracy observed by the classification system. In order to obtain a systematic list of occupations, they have been subdivided into 13 occupation groups:

OCCUPATION GROUP:

Technical work	2% (13)
Nursing and health	5% (30)
Teaching (relig.) work	8% (47)
Music work, etc.	8% (45)
Consultancy, EDP, etc.	6% (37)
Administration, office work	10% (55)
Commerce	5% (27)
Agriculture, etc.	10% (60)
Communications, transport	9% (54)
Manufacturing 1	9% (53)
Manufacturing 2	11% (61)
Crafts for the blind	12% (70)
Service sector	4% (25)
Other work	1% (4)
Total	100% (581)

A total of 30% of the severely impaired and partially sighted are employed in "manufacturing 1 and 2". About 25% of the blind are engaged in "crafts for the blind", and 17% in "music work, etc.". It is a feature of the guiding vision group that approx. 20% work in "agriculture, etc.".

About 20% of respondents, mainly from the group selected by the DBS, supplemented their primary occupations with some kind of paid extra work. About 50% of all

persons with extra work had the extra job in "teaching (relig.) work" or "music work, etc.".

A three-part division of occupations into job-status groups based on job title, work place conditions, educational qualifications and income before tax gave the following breakdown:

23% in job-status group I:

(teachers, organists, social workers, physio-therapists, etc.)

38% in job-status group II:

(self-employed in commerce and agriculture, etc., telephone operators, office staff, hospital assistants)

39% in job-status group III: (other, smaller self-employed persons, crafts for the blind, skilled and unskilled workers)

3.3.

EMPLOYMENT BEFORE AND AFTER LOSS OF SIGHT

Chapter 5

Apart from the extent of reduction of sight, the time of its occurrence in a person's life is of fundamental importance in selection of employment opportunity.

Approx. two-thirds (389) of all persons employed had difficulties with their sight before the age of 15.

The term "childhood blindness" in this context indicates that reduction in sight occurred before the age of 15 irrespective of degree, the term "adult blindness" refers to respondents whose first vision problems occurred after the age of 15, irrespective of degree.

About 15% of the adult-blind have attended a course for the adult-blind. There were very few adult-blind in the group selected by the Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted.

A comparison of the breakdown into occupation groups before loss of sight with a breakdown into current occupations provides an impression of the changes caused by loss of sight.

Nearly three-fifths of the adult-blind are engaged in a occupation group other than that held before loss of sight. This should be seen as a minimum figure, as it is not certain that those who have remained in the same occupation group as before sight-loss have in fact the same position at work. Conversely, it does not automatically follow that a change of occupation is the results of vision difficulties. There has been a relative increase in such occupation groups as "consultancy, EDP, etc.", "music work, etc.", "teaching (relig.) work" and "communications/transport".

There were no changes in "administration, office work" or "agriculture, etc.", whereas the number of employees in "commerce", "service sector", and "manufacturing 1 and 2" declined. Another feature of these occupation groups was that the majority of respondents who, at the time of the interview, were not employed had been engaged in these occupation groups while they had their sight.

More than two-thirds of respondents in occupation groups "nursing and health", "teaching (relig.) work" and "agriculture, etc." were able to retain their work in that field, whereas the corresponding figure for "service sector" is only one-fifth, although the two groups have much in common with regard to the propro-

tion of severely visually handicapped.

Approx. 60% of those who changed occupation groups attended vocational training after losing their sight. Of these, rather more than half had a vocational training from the period before loss of sight.

Shift to another occupation group occurs more frequently among the partially sighted than the other groups of visual acuity, possibly due to the fact that this group in particular may have different motives and that the alternative for the severely visually handicapped is usually either to keep trying in the same occupation group or to give up working.

A comparison between the childhood-blinded and adult-blinded and including the group selected by SIB shows that in many respects there are similarities between the breakdown of the two groups into occupation groups. The childhood-blinded are in the majority but especially in "teaching (relig.) work", "music work, etc." and "crafts for the blind", whereas the adult-blinded persons are to a greater extent represented in "administration/office work" and "agriculture, etc.".

3.4.

FORM OF EMPLOYMENT

Chapter 6

Approx. one quarter of those in employment were self-employed, one-third work in the private sector, one-third in the public sector, while the remainder work in sheltered occupations or in occupations at home.

Approx. one-half of the partially sighted are employed

in the private sector, while the proportion in the other sight groups declines with the increasing severity of the handicap. The most severely handicapped are either employed in the public sector or are self-employed.

The self-employed predominate in "agriculture, etc.", "commerce" and "crafts for the blind", while public employees are to be found primarily in "nursing and health", "teaching (relig.) work", "music work, etc." and "communications/transport" (telephone operators). Salaried workers in private enterprise are represented in "communications, transport", "administration/office work", "consultancy, EDP, etc." "service sector", and "manufacturing 1 and 2".

3.5.

WORK PLACE CONDITIONS

Chapter 7

Approx. one quarter are employed by companies, institutions, etc., with more than 100 employees (applies chiefly to the partially sighted).

Approx. 60% work a 40-hour week: again this is mainly applicable to the partially sighted. On the basis of information on primary and secondary employment, no. of hours worked at primary employment and income data, it is estimated that approx. 80% work full-time (30 hours or more per week), 10% part-time (20-29 hours) and 10% occasionally (1-19 hours). The largest percentage of full-time employees is to be found among the partially sighted and the smallest percentage among the blind, but the difference is not marked.

3.6.

EXECUTION OF WORK AND USE OF AIDS

Chapter 8

In addition to the above-mentioned features, adaptation to a particular work situation involves a number of measures to compensate people with a visual handicap, and most of these measures are more or less subject to personal influence. These are: aids, special working methods, assistance from sighted persons, omission of certain work functions, and participation in the planning of work.

Approx. 75% use special aids and working methods, either combined or individually. The degree of combination of these two measures varies quite considerably with status of visual acuity: more than 50% of the blind use both aids and special working methods, while this is the case with only 10% of the partially sighted.

If we include assistance from sighted persons, we find that a total of 40% use these three measures in their everyday work, most widespread among the blind (approx. 70%) and least among the partially sighted (14%).

There would not appear to be any marked difference between categories of sight with regard to planning of work to accommodate a visual handicap. There is the slight difference that approx. 40% of the partially sighted have not been involved in planning of work compared with just under 20% of other sight categories.

A closer study of planning of work with regard to problems of sight, shows that the public sector is more considerate than the private one. In status-of-employ-

ment group III among the partially sighted there were indeed very marked differences in this respect between the public and private sectors.

Among the blind and severely impaired persons, two-fifths have not omitted work functions or given up aids. The corresponding part in the guiding vision group is only about one quarter. This could indicate that this category experiences greater problems than the two above-mentioned, which may very well be attributable to the occupations in which they are primarily engaged ("agriculture, etc." and "commerce"). Three-fifths of the partially sighted have not omitted work functions or given up aids.

Omission of work functions appears to apply most frequently in "commerce" and "agriculture, etc.", and is least prevalent in "music work, etc." and "communications, transport".

Use of aids is most widespread in status-of-employment group I in all visual acuity groups.

Generally speaking, the majority of the blind respondents uses the special arrangements for the blind.

It is only among the partially sighted there would appear - in relation to other visual acuity groups - to be a lower proportion of respondents omitting functions in all status-of-employment groups.

3.7.

ASSISTANCE FROM SIGHTED PERSONS

Chapter 9

On average, assistance is provided four times daily. Average duration has been calculated at seven hours weekly. It should be noted, however, that only a relatively small number of those interviewed (approx. 200) were able to answer these questions, and there are grounds for supposing that it was easiest for those who receive relatively more assistance.

"Agriculture, etc." and "commerce" seem to be occupations involving the greatest degree of help. However it is possible here that there may be some confusion with help offered for other reasons.

With regard to size of the work-place, it seems to be particularly in the smaller place of employment that assistance is given, and help is usually afforded by one person - often the spouse, helping in the business.

Approx. one-half receives assistance in carrying out their work from only one person, mostly in "nursing and health" where assistance on the whole is of a brief nature, and in "crafts for the blind".

The group of partially sighted receive assistance mainly from colleagues at work, while the blind persons in smaller workplaces are assisted by members of their family and in larger work-places by staff employed for this and other purposes.

Assistance by colleagues is frequent but brief, whereas family assistance and help from specially employed staff are usually of a longer duration.

3.8.

INCOMES

Chapter 10

In the survey of incomes a distinction is made between gross income (before tax) from primary occupation, gross income from secondary occupation, and social-welfare allowances. The total is shown under total income.

All amounts mentioned below are average, monthly, gross sums.

The total amount of income is kr. 5,600 for all persons in the study who are gainfully employed. The group of respondents selected by the Danish Society for the Blind (DBS) had a total income of D.kr. 5,800, while that selected by the State Institute for the Blind and Partially Sighted (SIB) was kr. 5,100. It should, however, be noted that income in connection with primary occupation in the DBS group was kr. 4,000, while in the SIB group it was kr. 4,700. The explanation of the higher total income for the DBS group is partly that a larger proportion receives pensions, etc., and partly that a rather larger proportion has incomes from secondary occupations.

Three-quarters of those respondents reporting receipt of welfare allowances are to be found in this group. These allowances average about kr. 1,800 per month. Under current regulations all members of DBS are entitled to welfare allowances in one form or another.

In the DBS group no distinction is made between the incomes of various types for men and women. Such a distinction is apparent on the other hand in the SIB

group, where women earn kr. 3,500 from their primary occupation while the income of men is kr. 5,200.

The blind persons receive the highest total income (kr. 6,100), while the partially sighted persons receive the lowest (kr. 5,100).

The partially sighted persons on the other hand have the highest income when welfare allowances are removed: kr. 4,900, compared with kr. 3,800 for the blind. One-fourth of the blind persons supplement this income with minor jobs, but these do not make any radical change in the picture.

Although the occupation groups cover different jobs with different incomes, it is nevertheless possible to identify groups of relatively high income. These groups are "consultancy, EDP, etc.", "music work, etc.", "teaching (relig.) work" and "technical work", with total incomes ranging from 6,000 to 8,500 kr.

With the exception of the "crafts for the blind" and the "service sector", which have the lowest total income (kr. 3,300 and kr. 4,400 respectively), total incomes in the other groups are in the kr. 5,000-6,000 range. Income from employment is especially important in the following occupation groups: "teaching (relig.) work", "music work, etc." and "consultancy, EDP, etc.>"; the welfare-allowance structure on the other hand is more significant in such groups as "crafts for the blind" and "agriculture, etc.".

3.9.

TRANSPORT TO AND FROM WORK

Chapter 11

Average transport time between home and place of work is approx. 1 hour. Rather more than one half of the respondents uses public transportation, mainly in the Copenhagen area.

3.10.

EMPLOYMENT SITUATION FOR MEMBERS OF THE DANISH ASSOCIATION OF THE BLIND

Chapter 12

As there was an opportunity to examine in more detail the employment situation of members of the Danish Association of the Blind on the basis of material assembled in connection with formation of the group, additional material was obtained for all members of DBS. It was possible in this way to compute the employment frequency and quotients by sex, age and region.

The frequencies were calculated on the basis of all who were gainfully employed at the time of the study, i.e. including part-time and occasional labour.

Among all members of DBS aged 15-64 20 out of 100 are employed.

The employment frequency for men is 29, while for women it is 9.

In terms of age, the highest frequency for men occurs in the 35-44 age group (42%) and for women in the 25-34 age group (17%).

Employment frequency is highest in Copenhagen and suburbs.

Calculation of the share of the labour market shows that for every 100,000 persons of the labour force there are 25 members of DBS. This quotient cannot exceed a maximum of 131 per 100,000 if all 3,100 members aged 15-64 were employed.

4.

LIST OF JOB TITLES ARRANGED ACCORDING TO OCCUPATION

GROUPS

The following is a detailed list of the different occupations recorded during the survey. Occupations are listed under their respective occupational groups.

Technical work

00-02

Draftsman	Production engineer (eng.)
Production engineer (build.)	Supervisor (eng.)
Supervisor (build.)	Planning assistant (eng.)
Planning engineer (electric.)	Patents engineer
Production engineer (commun.)	

Nursing and health

03-05

Assistant matron	Occupational therapist
Other nursing work	Therapy assistant
Nursing attendant	Workshop instructor
Assistant nurse	Other health work
Hospital orderly	Chemist's assistant
Physiotherapist	

Teaching (and religious) work

06-07

Headmaster	Creative-art instructor
Univ. lecturer (civics)	Music teacher (elementary school)
Training-college teacher	Craft teacher (needle work)
Music teacher (from academy of music)	Instructor, other skills (DBS)
Other work, advanced educ.	Kindergarten teacher
Elementary-school teacher	Kindergarten assistant
Grammar-school teacher	Other work, kinder./youth center
History teacher	Information officer (DBS)
Music teacher (not elem.)	Minister of religion (Ev.-Luth.)
Instructor (Inst. f.Blind)	Minister of religion (other)

Music and related work

09

Artist	Tape editor
Salesroom designer	Singer (serious)
Potter	Singer (entertainer)
Journalist	Organist
Copywriter (advertising)	Musician, keyboard
Tape corrector	Musician, wind

Consultancy, EDP, etc.

0X-08

Accountant	Social welfare adviser (DBS)
Auditor (public/private)	Environmental instructor
Assistant, social welfare	Assistant librarian
Social worker	Systems planner (EDP)
Manager, camp-scool	Programmer
Youth center instructor	Translator
Home service counsellor (DBS)	Lawyer

Administration, office work

10-29

Office manager, legal	Typist
Member of appeals board	Card-puncher
Other work, public sector	Bank supervisor
Prisons employee	Travel agency clerk
Works manager	Forwarding agent
Other work, private admin.	Clearing agent
Book-keeper	Storekeeper
Cashier	Order processor
Secretary	Clerical worker
Medical Seretary	Accounting clerk
	Other office work

Commerce

30-33

Wholesale merchant	General help, car dealer's
Retailer	Sales assistant (sport's goods)
Insurance representative	Sales assistant (radio/TV)
Estate agent	Sales assistant (furniture)
Sales consultant	Sales assistant (paints)
Sales assistant (textiles)	Street salesman

Agriculture, etc.

40-59

Farmer	Horticultural labourer
Farm manager	Other horticultural work
Livestock breeder	Other farming work
Farm labourer	Other fisheries work
Other agricultural worker	Woodman
Herdsmen	Labourer (gravel pit)
Horticultural foreman	

Communications, transport
60-69

Other work, road traffic
Station worker (railway)
Telephone operator
Postman

Office caretaker
Office messenger (bank, etc.)
Porter (hospital messenger)

Manufacturing 1
70-79

Hand-weaver
Furniture upholsterer
Tailoress
Seamstress (leatherwork)
Shoe Factory worker
Locksmith
Other foundry work
Instrument mechanic
Machine erector
Woodturner
Milling cutter
Machinist (mach. tools)
Motor mechanic
Cycle repairmann
Labourer (blacksmith)
Plumber
Welder
Shipyard labourer
Semi-skilled worker (eng.)

Semi skilled worker (punch)
Metal-grinder
Other engineering work
Electrician
Electronics fitter
Industrial fitter
General worker (slot mach.)
Carpenter
Joiner
Labourer (boatbuilding)
Cabinetmaker
Cooper
Bricklayer
Fitter (precast concrete)
Builder's labourer
Other building work
General labourer

Manufacturing 2

80-89

Braille duplicator (plastics)	Darkroom assistant
Braille duplicator (paper)	Other photographic work
Job printer	Pasteboard worker
Bookbinder's labourer	Other paper-industry work
Other printing work	Other manufacturing-2 work
Other glass/ceramics work	Packer, machine
Porcelain grinder	Packer, manual
Other kiln work	General packing worker
Baker	Tape packer
Labourer, brewery	Labeller
Filleter	Packer
Butcher (slaughterhouse)	Other packaging work
Labourer (slaughterhouse)	Forklift-truck driver
Labourer (dairy)	Docker
Labourer (cider works)	Warehouse worker
Precast-concrete worker	Plant-hirer
	Other warehouse/packing work

Crafts for the blind

85

Piano tuner	Unskilled worker (brush-making)
Brush-maker	Basket-maker

Service sector

90-99

Night watchman	School janitor
Sandwich maker	Cleaner
Home help	Cleaner (air/rail)
Waiter	Gent's hairdresser
Caretaker	Laundry worker
Boilerman	Campsite owner
Verger	
Labourer, cemetery	

Note: Occupations are listed in the order shown in appendix table 1 of the report. The following occupations have, therefore, been omitted from the list:

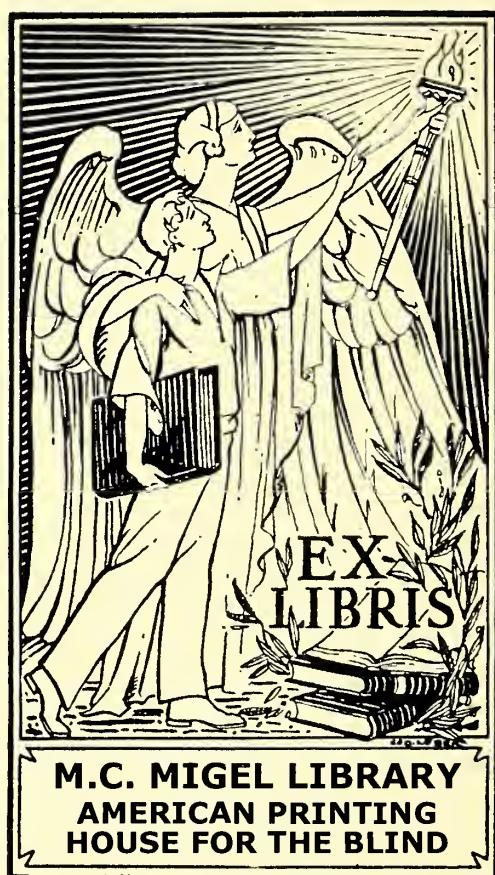
Architect	Supervisor (chemistry)
Lekturer (economics)	Bank teller
Textiles dyer	Unskilled worker

5.

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Volume 1: The text in Danish.

Volume 2: Part 1:

Tables with tables of contents in
Danish and English.

Part 2:

Appendix tables with tables of contents
in Danish and English.

Part 3:

Appendix in Danish.

Furthermore summaries in English and Danish are
prepared.